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traces and intersections
from **Pinning it Down: Drawing as Capture**

Tracing lines

In our collaborative art practice, what draws us to the shadow is that in performing, the shadow is both distinctively us, something we recognize (*heimlich*) and at the same time unfamiliar (*unheimlich*). This sense of being both familiar and unfamiliar is heightened through the use of props and disguise, enabling others to inhabit our shadow-worlds, standing alongside and between us. Thus the realm of the imagination, in its desire to see these fictive encounters between our selves and 'others' emerge and unfold, is awakened and, through our play, images and ideas emerge.

Collaborative drawing has evolved to become a key method in our practice that links several ongoing projects, and continues to be a creative catalyst for new ideas and trajectories. Our first foray into collaborative drawing produced a series titled **Proteiform**; the notion of the protean nature - to change shape and form, to become unrecognisable at will – underpins our interest in the shadow and metamorphosis. This series – in which miniature cut-outs of our shadowy-selves encountered the manifestations of our human psyche writ large – plays on the enduring fascination the shadow play holds, from its origins as a pre-cinematic parlour game. We are present or re-presented three times, in the photographically derived cut outs, as the monstrous shadows and as the drawing hand, but at the same time absent as solid physical bodies.

In making shadow drawings we started to consider the wider scene involving our whole bodies within the space. **The Myth of Origins** series expands the scene of the shadow play to capture the artist's bodies more fully – in the same way a wide-angle lens reveals the full scene; the *mise-en-abyme*.

The Myth of Origins series has enabled us to take on characters, enact transgressive scenarios, and to create tensions by suggesting the possibility of an action that is about to occur. The outcome is not revealed but comes alive in the imagination. Our performances are enacted privately, either for the camera or captured as a drawing, enabling selected still images of sequences to be made public as the final piece.

The Unnamed

The silhouette of the absent subject is depicted in line and watercolour in our drawings: the page in place of the wall. In Manchester University Museum we substituted our studio for the Entomology storeroom. The series of drawings that followed were exhibited as **The Non-existence of the Unnamed**. Zoological convention specifies that if a specimen has not been classified within the collection then it is effectively nonexistent and unseen: invisible within the Museum. This double nature appealed to us – the possibility of being essentially 'out of place' – present and unseen at the same time; a method we have applied to our practice over the last ten years.

Our siting of the physical process of making the drawings within the entomology store was integral to the project and afforded access to a wide range of specimens. The restraints of working in someone else's workspace influenced our drawn responses – in our small, dark corner the physical contortions required both to hold poses and to capture the shadows, produced a mirroring of our surroundings – literally pinning the subject against a white surface under the glare of a spotlight.

We enjoy the transgressive nature of these drawings - of pinning a tarantula as elegantly as a brooch - this is not how you treat a collection, even a teaching collection. We enjoy the shift from specimen as artefact 'modelled' by artist to the images where the artist and specimen become one morphed form. Likewise, the distorted shadow of an arm holding a stick insect starts to become a stick form. It was our intention to confront anxieties about the processes of preservation, suffocation and dissection: of the close proximity of certain specimens and their particular qualities. The series of images shows the particular intimacy of working with the collection in this way – and our 'working intimacy' – to push and cajole, to pin and hold. The drawings are 'framed' as tight crops – limbs disappear; faces are lost – the grotesque manipulations continue off the page. The loss of self in the images – a genuine misrecognition of which of us was the subject in some of the poses has led to an almost wilful misprision regarding our self re-presentation. This blurring of forms extends our narrative as collaborating individuals.

Intersections

Marina Warner observes *"The theme [of the double] is intertwined with technologies of reproduction, first optical, then, increasingly biological. Representation itself acts as a form of doubling: representation exists in magical relation to the apprehensible world, it can exercise the power to make something come alive apparently"*.¹

In 2008 we were drawn to replicate ourselves faithfully using contemporary light-based technology. We wanted to expand our engagement with 'uncanny' doubling using new white light based technologies as a tool for drawing, and capturing, ourselves in three dimensions. This 'photographic' replication of our own bodies would avoid reliance on an individual's 'craft' skill. The 3D data we captured through the structured light scanning process is first fragmented then sutured back into a composite whole to make a 3D print. The data itself is formed by cloud data points, rendered as wire-mesh models. As forms in space these mesh models could be of any scale and enabled an expanded navigation; moving virtually around the body; parallel, perpendicular; 360 degrees on every axis.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold in his book *Lines: a brief history* (2007) describes the delicate process of lace-making, onto parchment or cotton lining which is then detached leaving the lace, as *'punto in aria'*² - stitching in the air. This goes some way to articulating our digital drawing in space, formed by cloud data points and the lines 'drawn' between them. This desire to explore the interior of these 'drawn' forms in space brought us to a further digital solution.

In *Anatomy Acts* (2006) Roberta McGrath claims that, *"[...] modern 'virtual' technologies of dissection and mass circulation cannot be understood without the physical work of anatomical dissection"*.³ The connection here between the editing table and the anatomical table is germane to our practice. The anatomical dissection, originally referencing the blood and guts of cutting and revealing, can now also be understood in the contemporary virtual processes of ortho-slicing, x-rays and MRI scans. The dissection, whether virtual or real, invokes the spectacle of death. Any journey to the body's interior encounters the intersection of the public and private body - to 'open' the body is to know it and own it, in some way. McGrath maintains that, *"with the invention of radiography the woman's body becomes a living cabinet of curiosity"*.⁴ Our animated work **Inside the Invisible** (2010) refutes this curiosity, re-imagining the conjoined body of artist and animal as a grid like carapace, navigable as both an external and internal landscape. It moves from exterior to interior: from object to subject. However it is not an interior of organs and flesh – the interior is the underside of the exterior data – a negative landscape. The filmic mobility of a virtual 3D camera enables a re-examination of the data: through our agency, the camera skimmed imagined 'surfaces' and hung, suspended, in cavernous hollows. No interior is revealed in terms of the sensual body.

In a close, working relationship that does not reveal or ascribe jobs or roles to individuals, our drawing practice has become a way of 'performing' the collaborative process. It is a space to test out ideas that are fragile, playful, ridiculous, partial and interlinked, entangled in our extended research and interests; a space where we can freely comment on the nature and assumptions of collaboration, create doubles at will, work with the most elemental technologies and make many happy and creative mistakes.

This is an excerpt from the plenary presentation by Brass Art – **Pinning it Down: *Drawing as Capture***, hosted by the University of Huddersfield in conjunction with the European Sculpture Network, 2011.

¹ Warner, M. (2004), **Fantastic Metamorphoses and Other Worlds**, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.165.

² Ingold, T. (2007), **Lines: a brief history**, London: Routledge, p.52.

³ McGrath, R. (2006) 'Moving Pictures: gender and the visualisation of life', in **Anatomy Acts**, Eds. Patrizio, A. & Kemp, D., Edinburgh: Birlinn, pp.63-65.

⁴ *ibid*, pp.63-65.